

A quick introduction to goal maps

Clarify what you want, why you want it, and how to achieve it

Target audience: everyone interested,
no special knowledge necessary

Author: Edgar Hartel

Date: published October 2018

Reading time: 10-20 minutes

Terms: free for non-commercial use (license details below),
commercial use requires separate agreement

Page layout: allows easy reading
without scrolling,
even on
very small screens



Creative Commons 3.0 Unported License
Attribution - NonCommercial - SharedAlike

Do you have goals?

Something you want to achieve?

Something that is worth
a mental effort?

If so, this introduction is for you.

A goal seldom comes alone.
It is usually logically connected
with other goals.

For instance, some goals
can only be reached if others
are reached first.

In order to achieve what you
really want efficiently (or at all),
you first need to **clearly identify**
your goals -- and their
connections.

Unfortunately, **human minds**
cannot be equally aware
of many factors at a time, even
when they are important.

We need a workaround for this
awareness problem.

A **goal map** is a good tool
for this purpose.

It's also a good planning tool for
your actions.

Let me show you how it works,
using **two examples**:

1. "I want to buy a bicycle"
2. "I want to save the world"

Progress

Intro done

"Buy a bicycle" example up next
"Save the world" example

Achievement indicators

Recap

Checklist

I want to keep it simple
and just use the word "goal"
for something you might prefer
to call "objective", "target" or
"measure".

Now let's start.

Goal map (example 1)

We will develop this **goal map** as a boxes-and-arrows diagram.

It's not perfect, but really useful, and easy to make and understand.

Fig. 1a : goal map example "Buy a bicycle"

Goal map (example 1)

Buy a bicycle

Let's say I want to buy
a bicycle.

That's **the goal I am
most aware of**, and it
goes into the first box.

Fig. 1b : goal map example "Buy a bicycle"

Goal map (example 1)

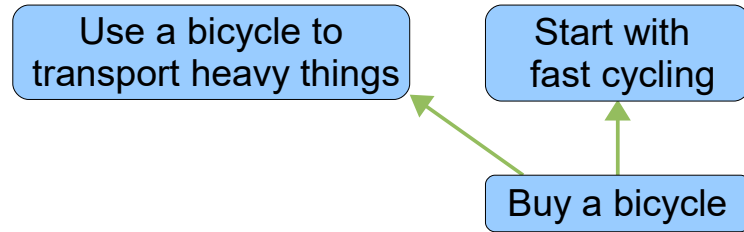
Buy a bicycle

The diagram develops
as I repeatedly ask myself
three questions:

1. Why do I want this?

Fig. 1c : goal map example "Buy a bicycle"

Goal map (example 1)



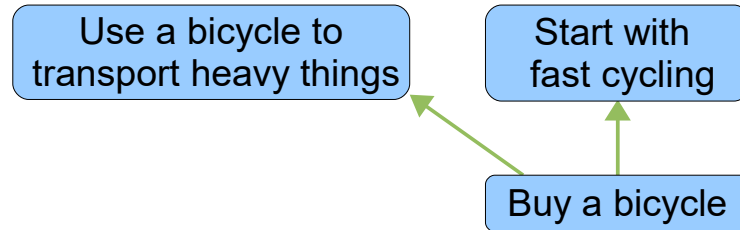
Here are two answers
to that question,
phrased as goals, too.

The arrows indicate ...

Fig. 1d : goal map example "Buy a bicycle"

Goal map (example 1)

- ↑ : ... is necessary to ...
- ↑ : ... is very helpful to ...
- ↑ : ... is helpful to ...



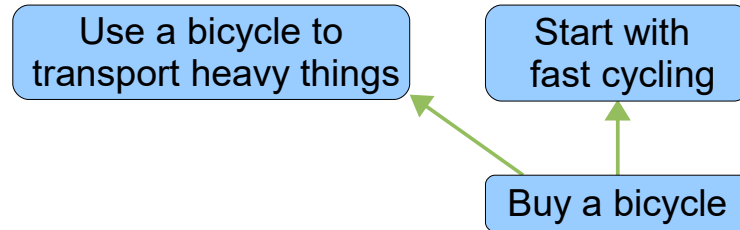
... that, if you don't have a bicycle, buying one is very helpful to achieve the higher goals.

Note the legend above.

Fig. 1e : goal map example "Buy a bicycle"

Goal map (example 1)

- ↑ : ... is necessary to ...
- ↑ : ... is very helpful to ...
- ↑ : ... is helpful to ...



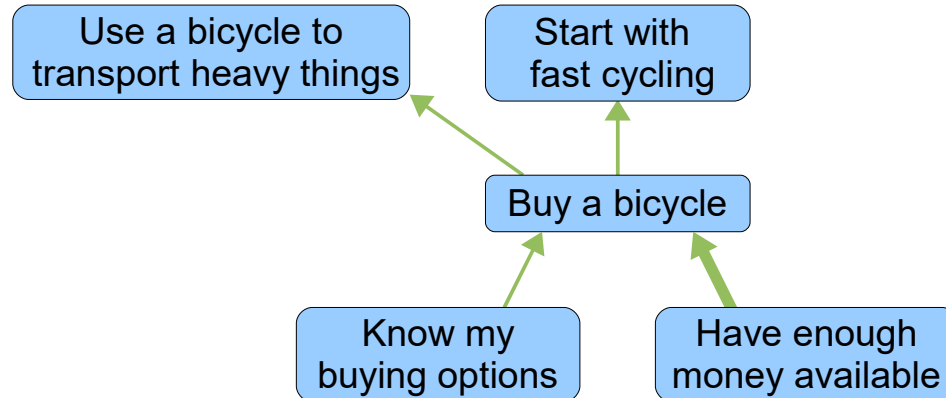
The next question is:

2. What can **help** me,
or is **necessary**,
to achieve this?

Fig. 1f : goal map example "Buy a bicycle"

Goal map (example 1)

- ↑ : ... is necessary to ...
- ↑ : ... is very helpful to ...
- ↑ : ... is helpful to ...



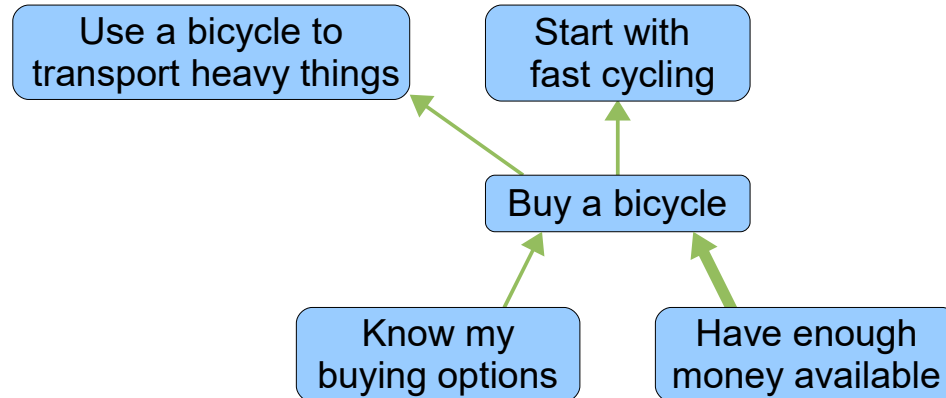
Here are two answers, again phrased as goals.

Note that one is **very helpful** (↑) while the other is **necessary** (↑).

Fig. 1g : goal map example "Buy a bicycle"

Goal map (example 1)

- ↑ : ... is necessary to ...
- ↑ : ... is very helpful to ...
- ↑ : ... is helpful to ...



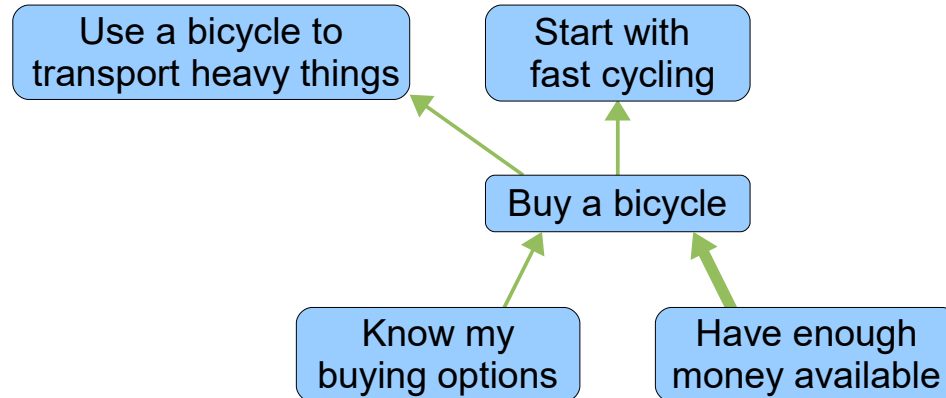
And the last question is:

3. Which other goals conflict with this one, if any?

Fig. 1h : goal map example "Buy a bicycle"

Goal map (example 1)

- ↑ : ... is necessary to ...
- ↑ : ... is very helpful to ...
- ↑ : ... is helpful to ...

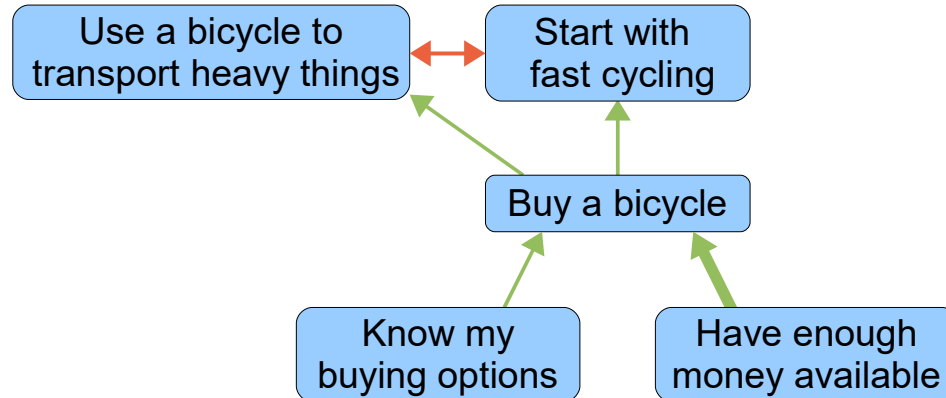


So far, I don't see anything conflicting with my "buy a bicycle" goal.

Fig. 1i : goal map example "Buy a bicycle"

Goal map (example 1)

- ↑ : ... is necessary to ...
- ↑ : ... is very helpful to ...
- ↑ : ... is helpful to ...
- ↕ : ... conflicts with ...
- ↕ : ... may conflict with ...
- ↕ : ... competes with ...



However, bicycles that are good for transporting heavy things are not so good for fast cycling.

Fig. 1j : goal map example "Buy a bicycle"

Goal map (example 1)

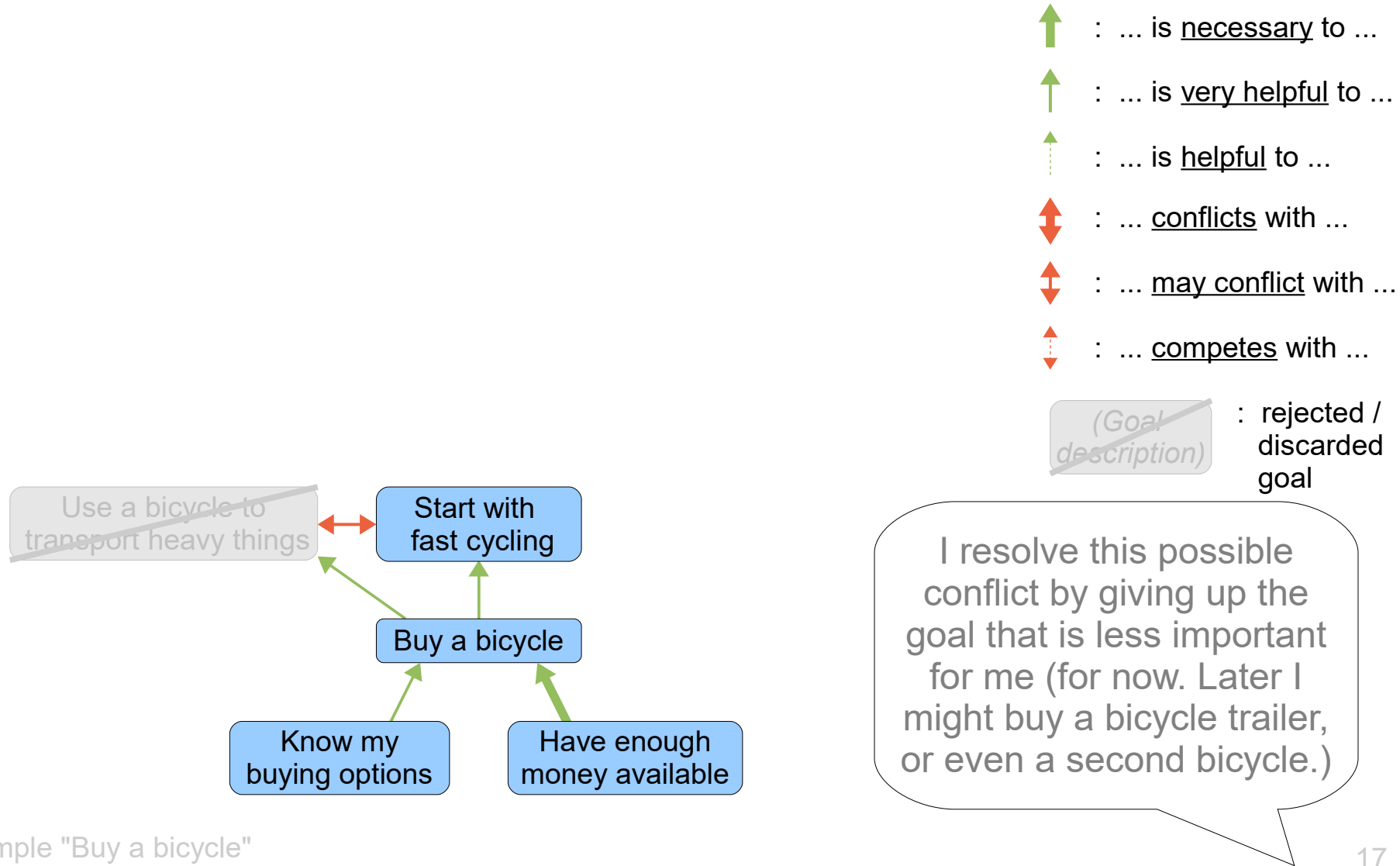
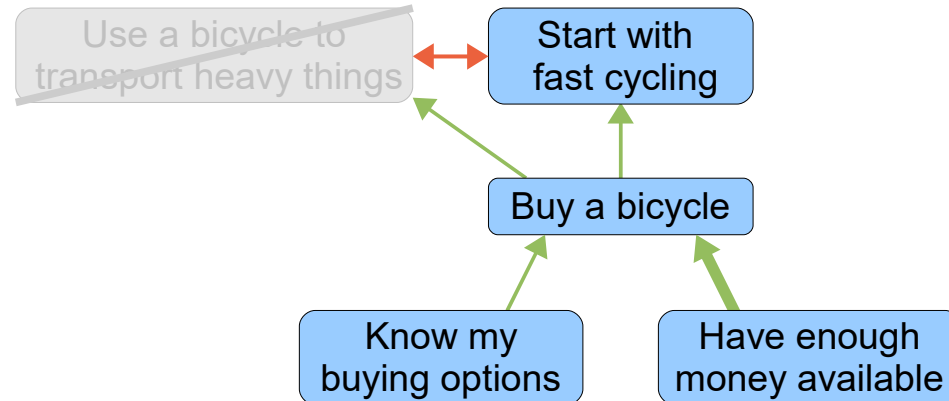


Fig. 1k : goal map example "Buy a bicycle"

Goal map (example 1)



- ↑ : ... is necessary to ...
- ↑ : ... is very helpful to ...
- ↑ : ... is helpful to ...
- ↕ : ... conflicts with ...

Back to the first question:

1. Why do I want this?

I ask this question for each new goal box until I get a final answer.

Question 1 leads upwards in the diagram ...

Fig. 1l : goal map example "Buy a bicycle"

Goal map (example 1)

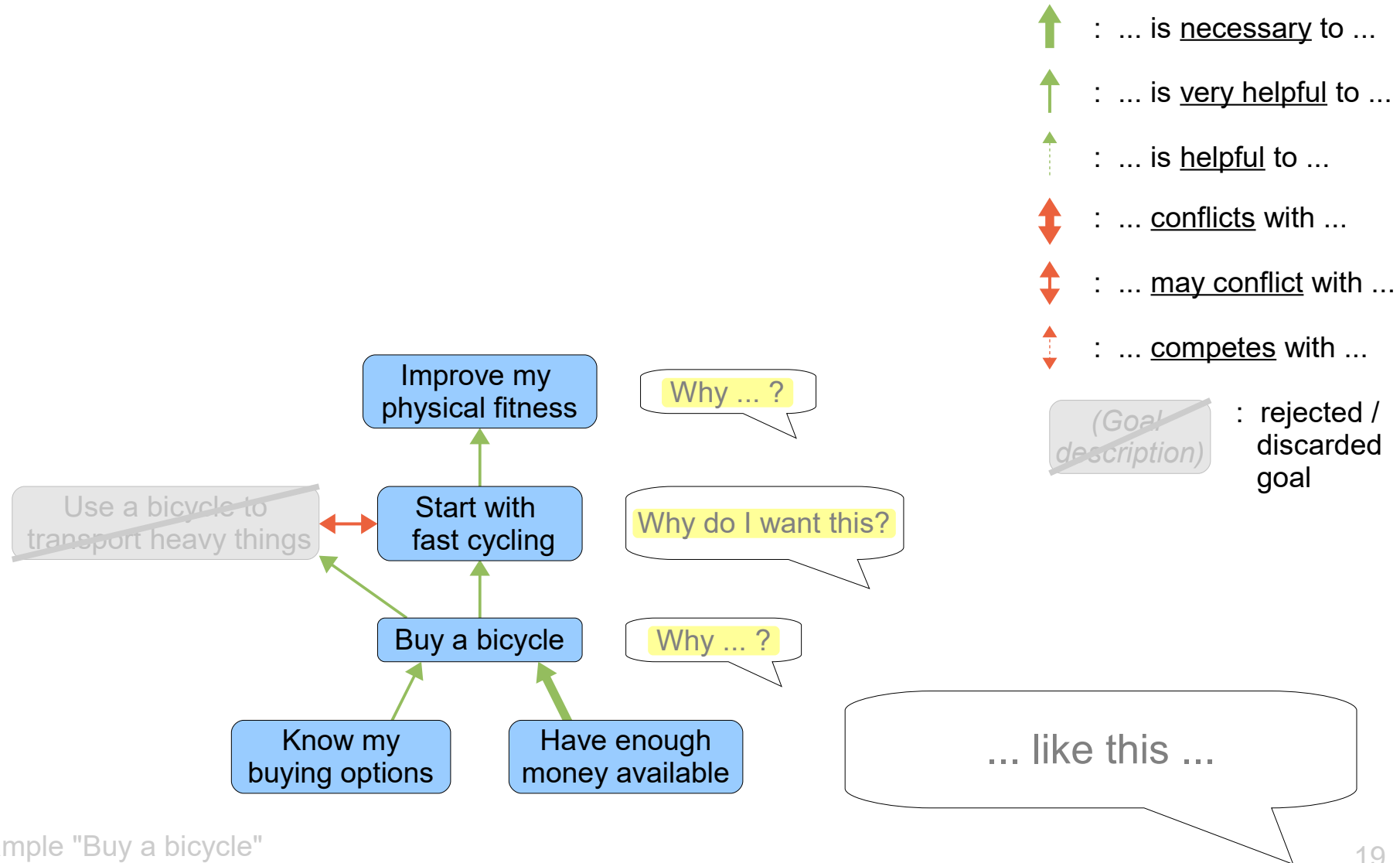


Fig. 1m : goal map example "Buy a bicycle"

Goal map (example 1)

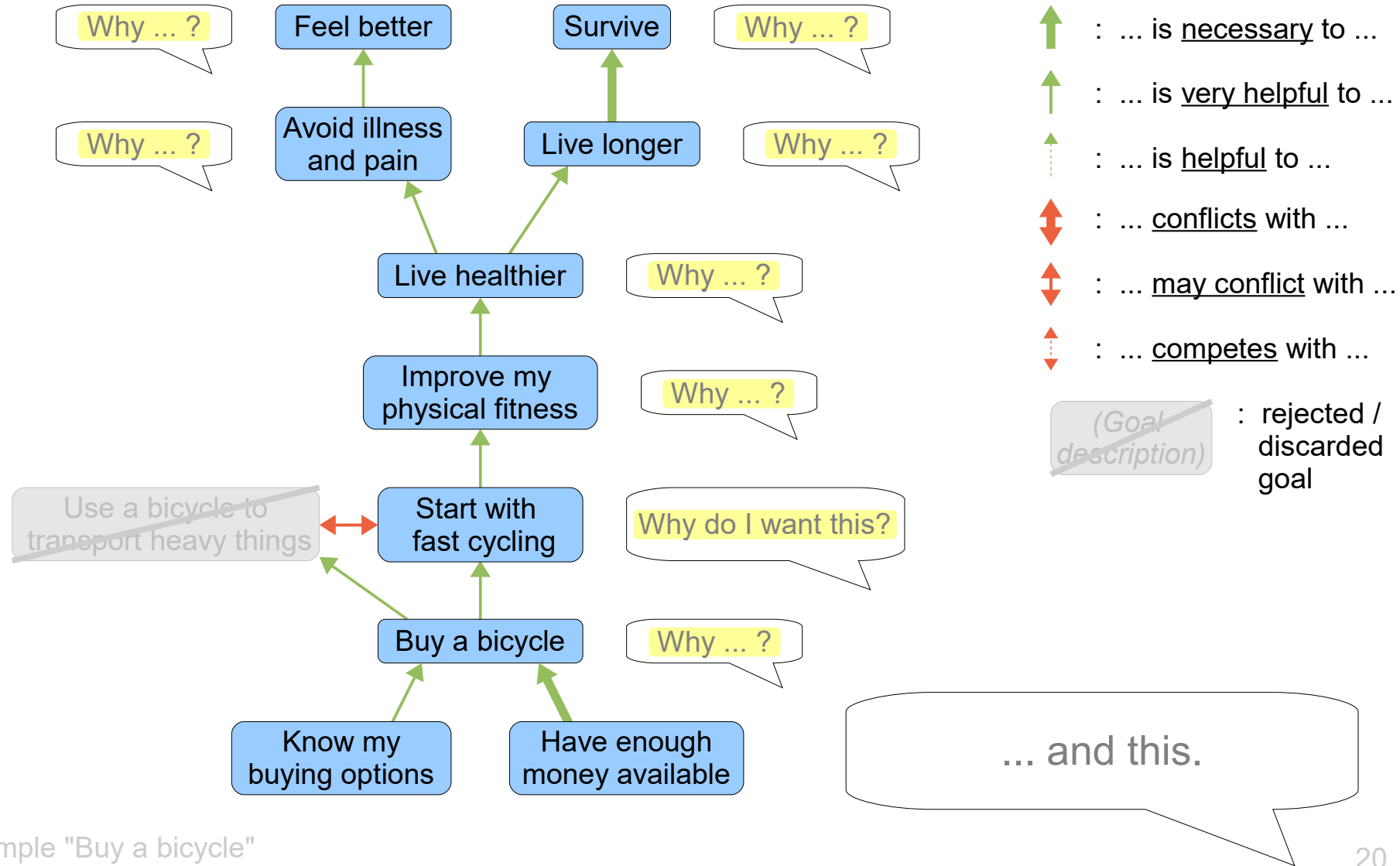
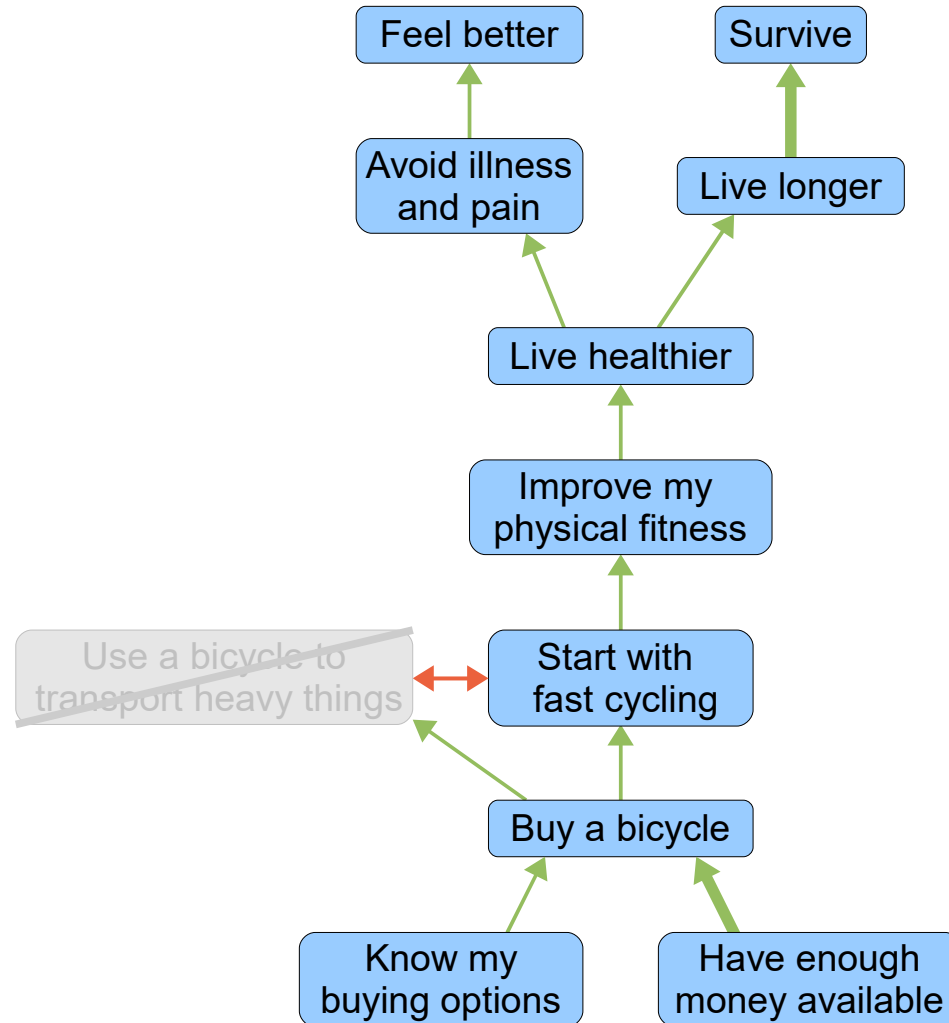


Fig. 1n : goal map example "Buy a bicycle"

Goal map (example 1)



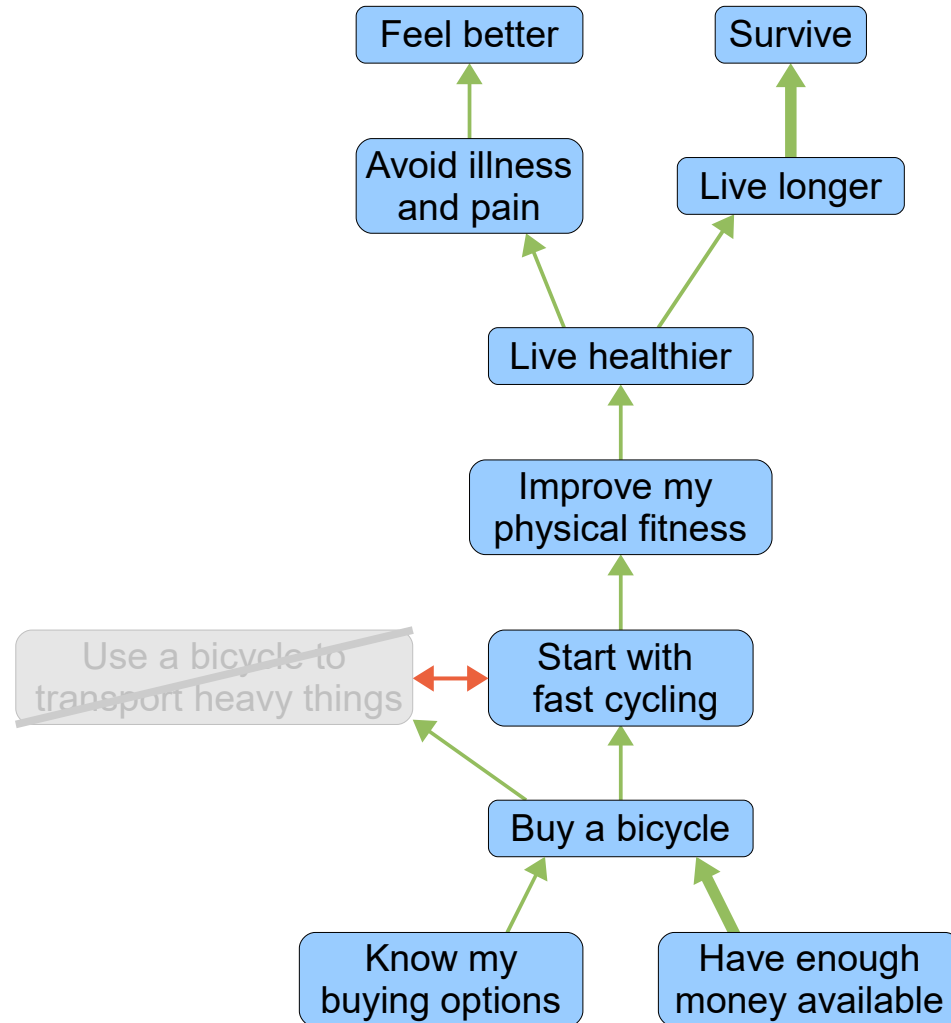
Survival and **feeling better** are both ultimate goals. Because when I ask "Why do I want this?" I can only answer "my brain works this way", and that is not a goal.

Most, if not all, human activities can be traced back to an ultimate **survival** and/or **feeling better** goal.

Usually we are not aware of this, because we don't ask "Why ... ?" often enough.

Fig. 1o : goal map example "Buy a bicycle"

Goal map (example 1)



- ↑ : ... is necessary to ...
- ↑ : ... is very helpful to ...
- ↑ : ... is helpful to ...
- ↕ : ... conflicts with ...

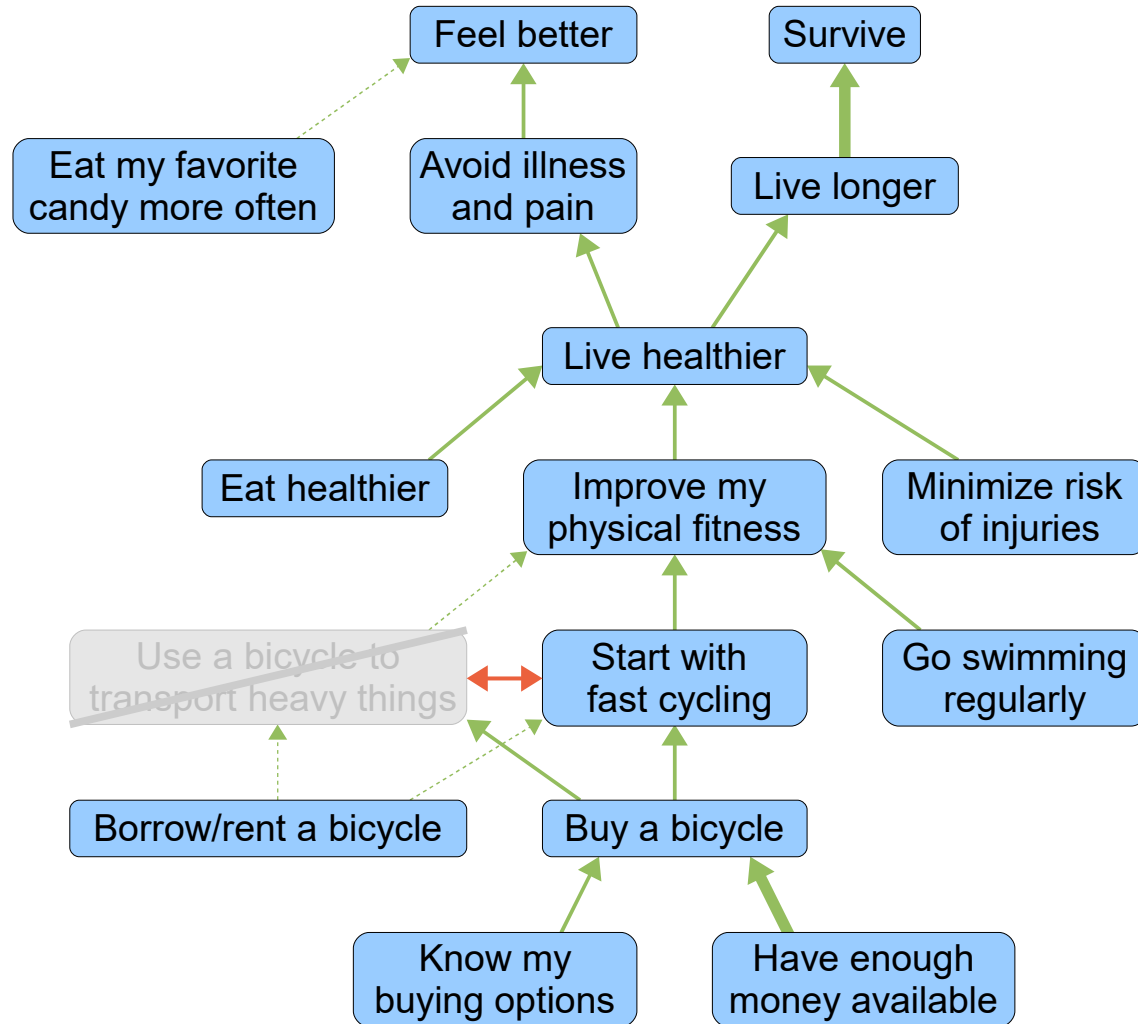
Now let's apply question 2 to **each** goal box:

2. What can **help** me, or is **necessary**, to achieve this?

Question 2 leads downwards in the diagram ...

Fig. 1p : goal map example "Buy a bicycle"

Goal map (example 1)



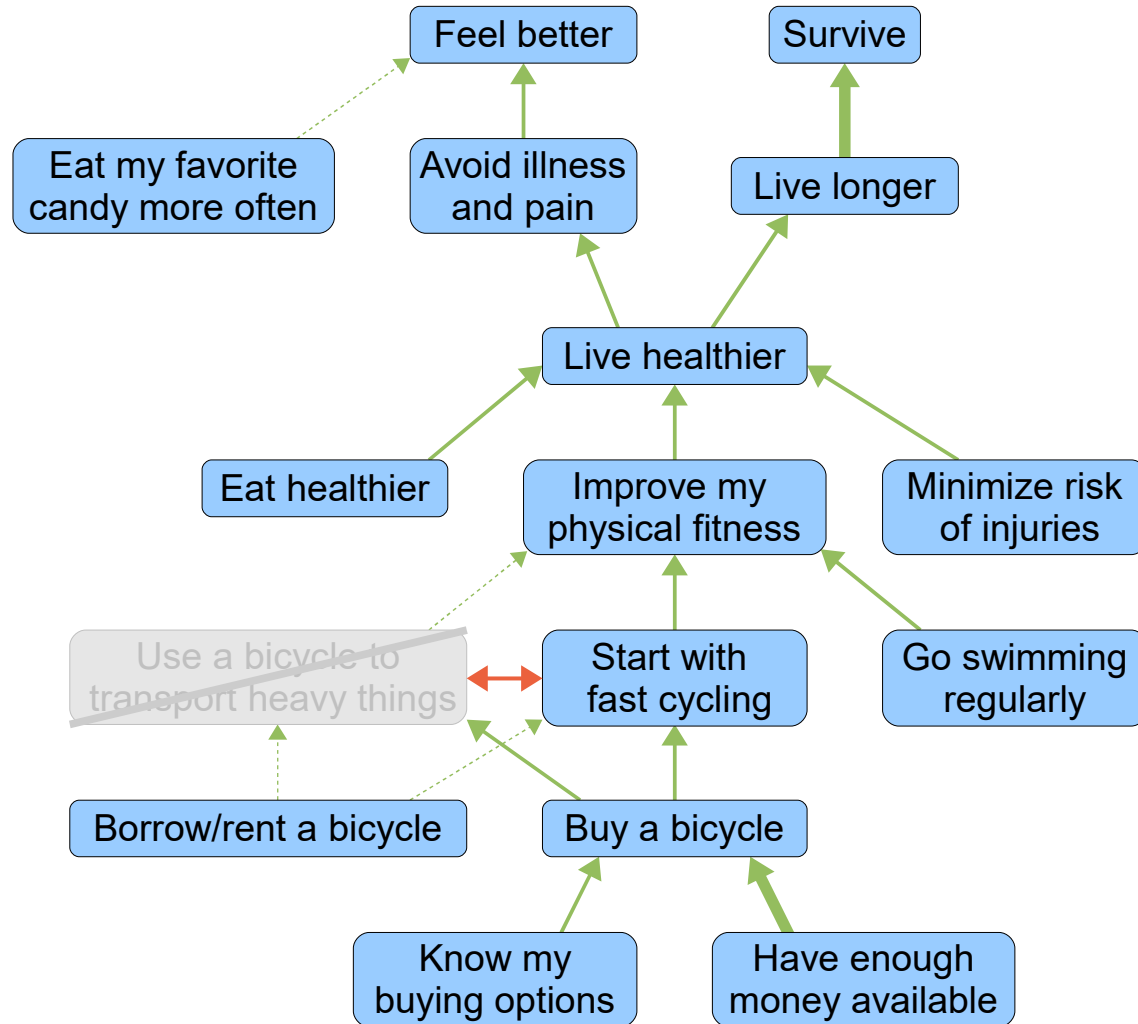
- ↑ : ... is necessary to ...
- ↑ : ... is very helpful to ...
- ↑ : ... is helpful to ...
- ↕ : ... conflicts with ...
- ↕ : ... may conflict with ...
- ↕ : ... competes with ...
- ~~(Goal description)~~ : rejected / discarded goal

... like this.

More goal boxes could be added, but you get the idea.

Fig. 1q : goal map example "Buy a bicycle"

Goal map (example 1)



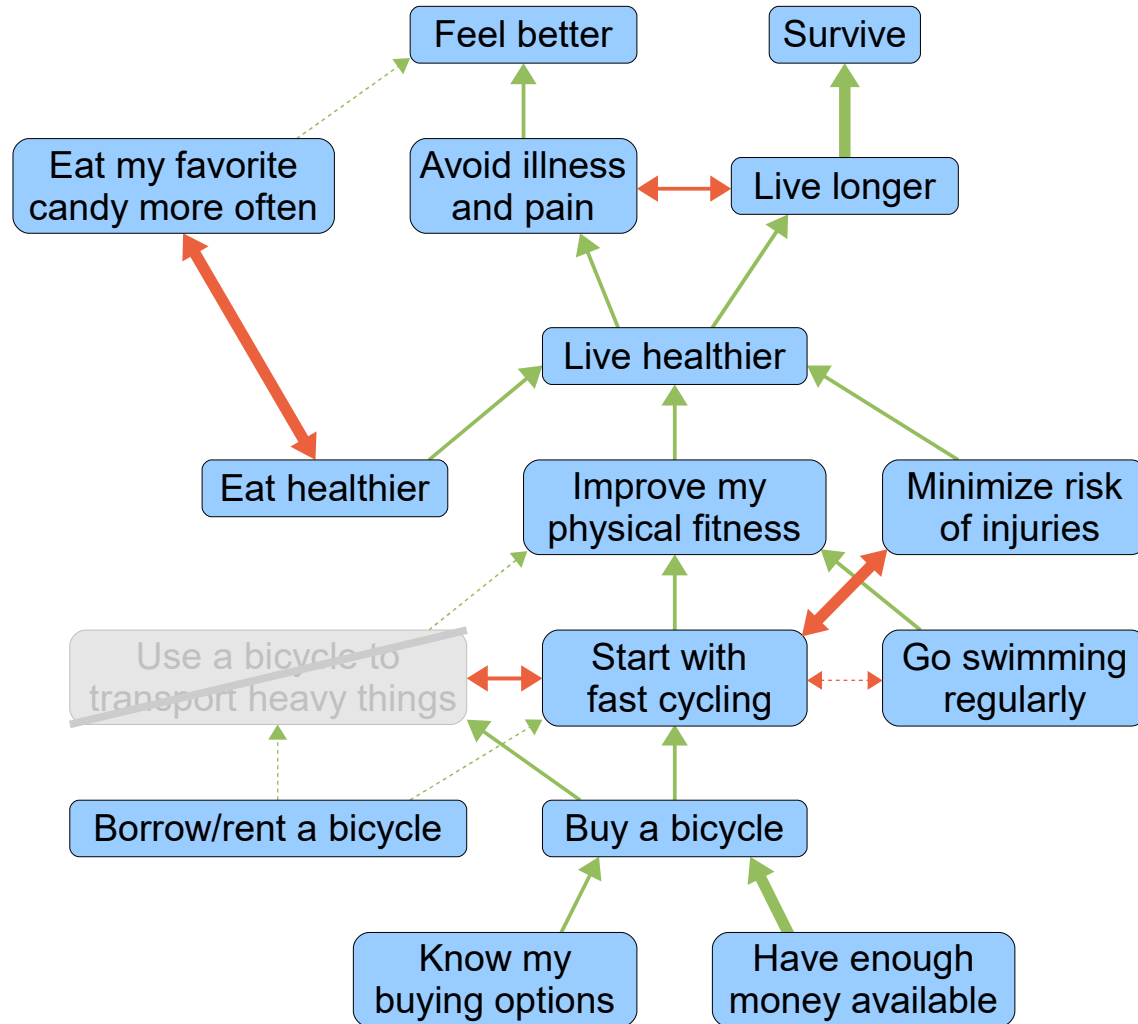
- ↑ : ... is necessary to ...
- ↑ : ... is very helpful to ...
- ↑ : ... is helpful to ...
- ↕ : ... conflicts with ...
- ↕ : ... may conflict with ...
- ↕ : ... competes with ...

Finally, we need to look again at **each** goal box and ask question

3. Which other goals conflict with this one, if any?

Fig. 1r : goal map example "Buy a bicycle"

Goal map (example 1)



Oops.

Apparently there are some internal **goal conflicts** in this example.

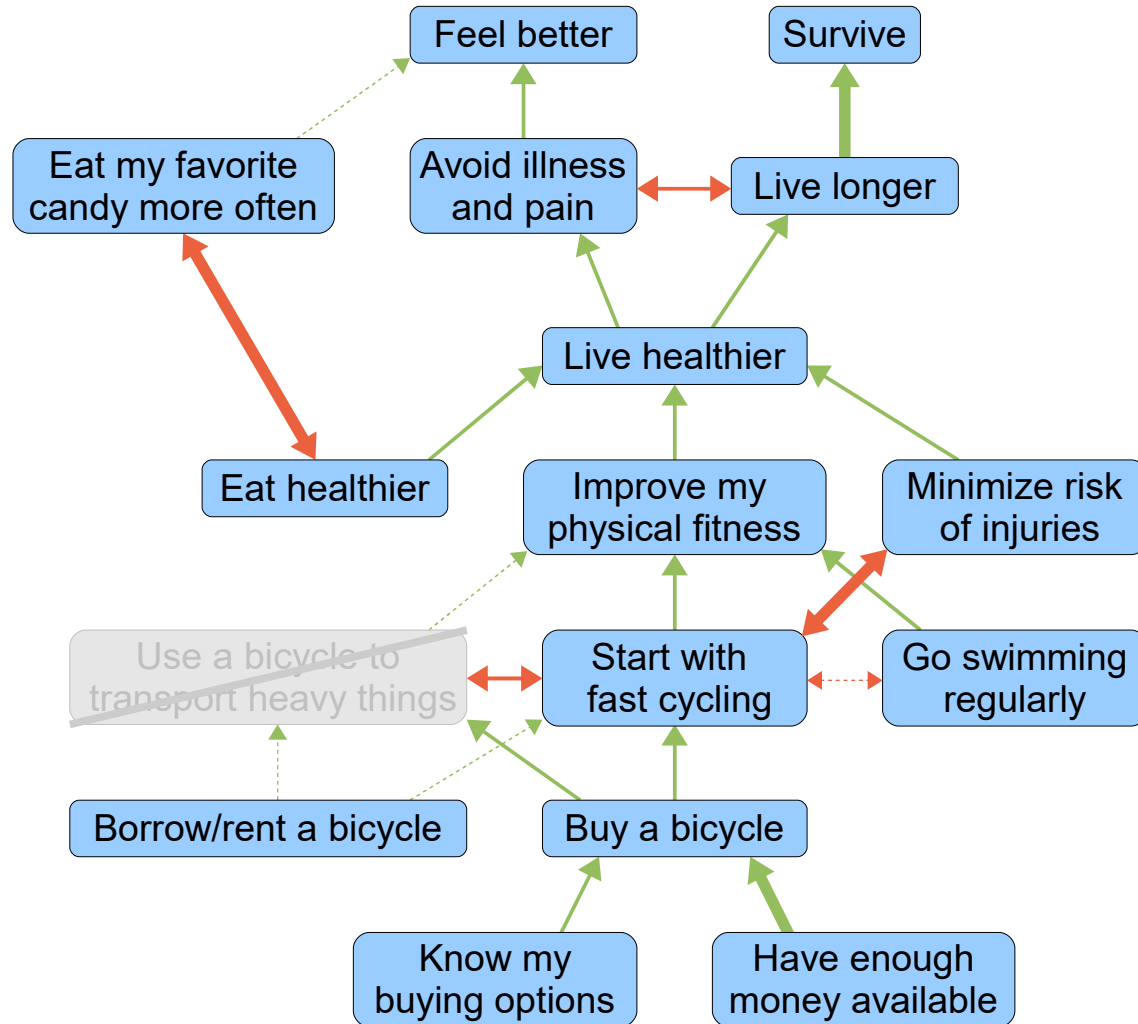
Not really surprising,
because they are very
common, even in simple
scenarios.

Be aware that any such map only shows what **one person** (or a group of like-minded persons) wants.

There may well be conflicts
with other people's goals.
That's a different story.

Fig. 1s : goal map example "Buy a bicycle"

Goal map (example 1)

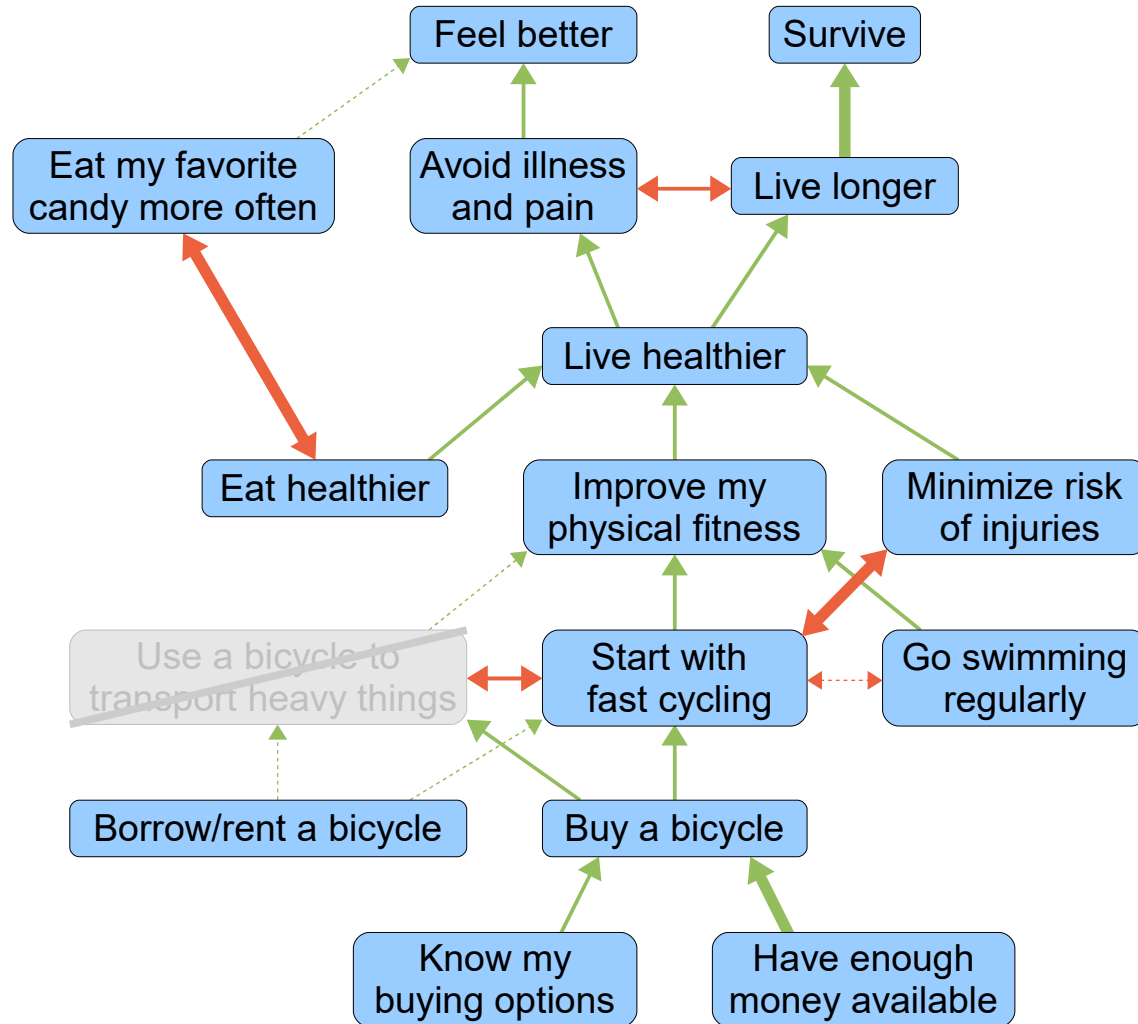


- ↑ : ... is necessary to ...
- ↑↑ : ... is very helpful to ...
- ↑... : ... is helpful to ...
- ↕ : ... conflicts with ...
- ↕... : ... may conflict with ...
- ↕... : ... competes with ...

While goal conflicts always are unwanted, they only **become** problems if they remain undetected and **unresolved**. Which they unfortunately often do.

Fig. 1t : goal map example "Buy a bicycle"

Goal map (example 1)



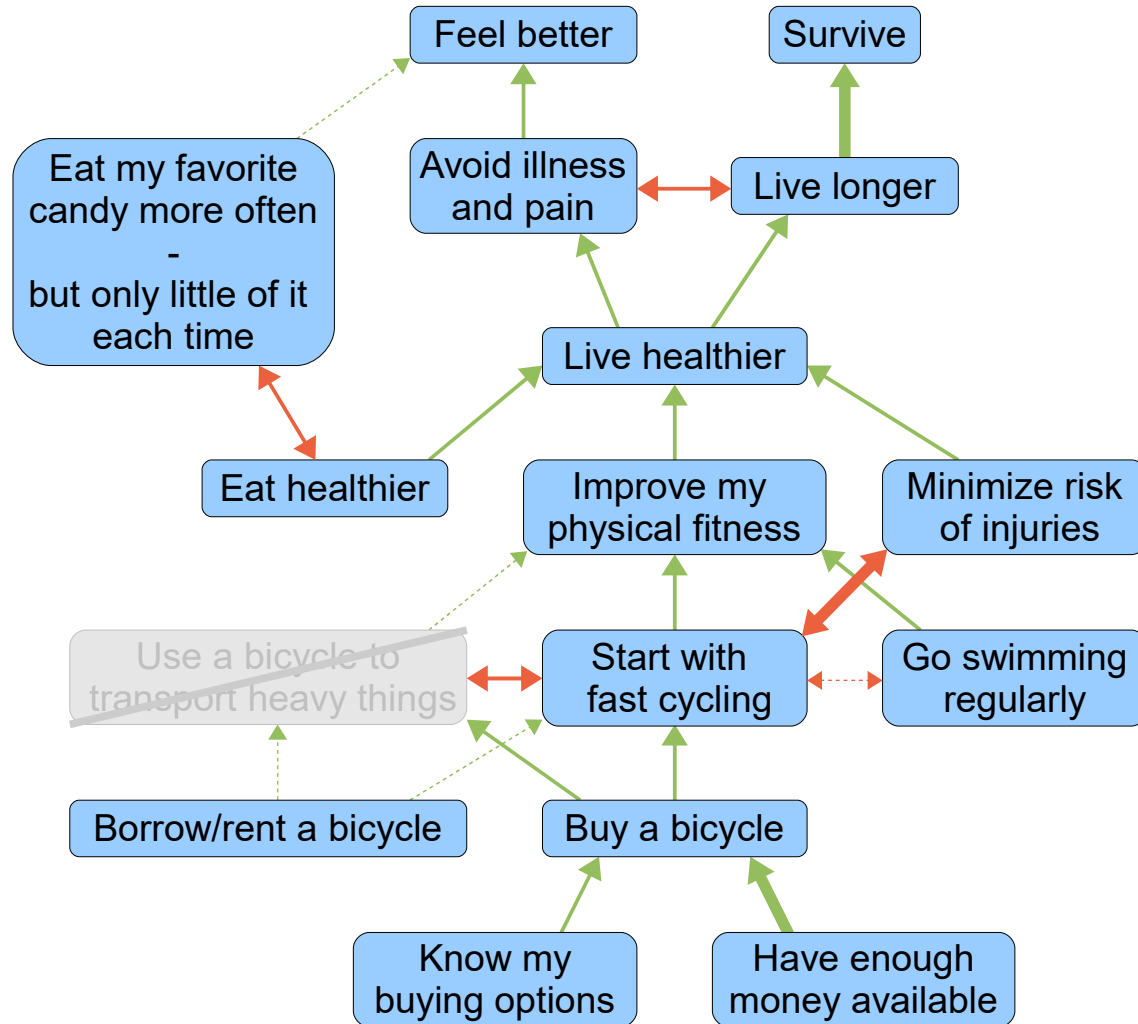
- ↑ : ... is necessary to ...
- ↑ : ... is very helpful to ...
- ↑ : ... is helpful to ...
- ↕ : ... conflicts with ...
- ↕ : ... may conflict with ...
- ↕ : ... competes with ...
- ~~(Goal description)~~ : rejected / discarded goal

So I want to resolve at least my direct goal conflicts (↕).

There are different ways of doing this.

Fig. 1u : goal map example "Buy a bicycle"

Goal map (example 1)

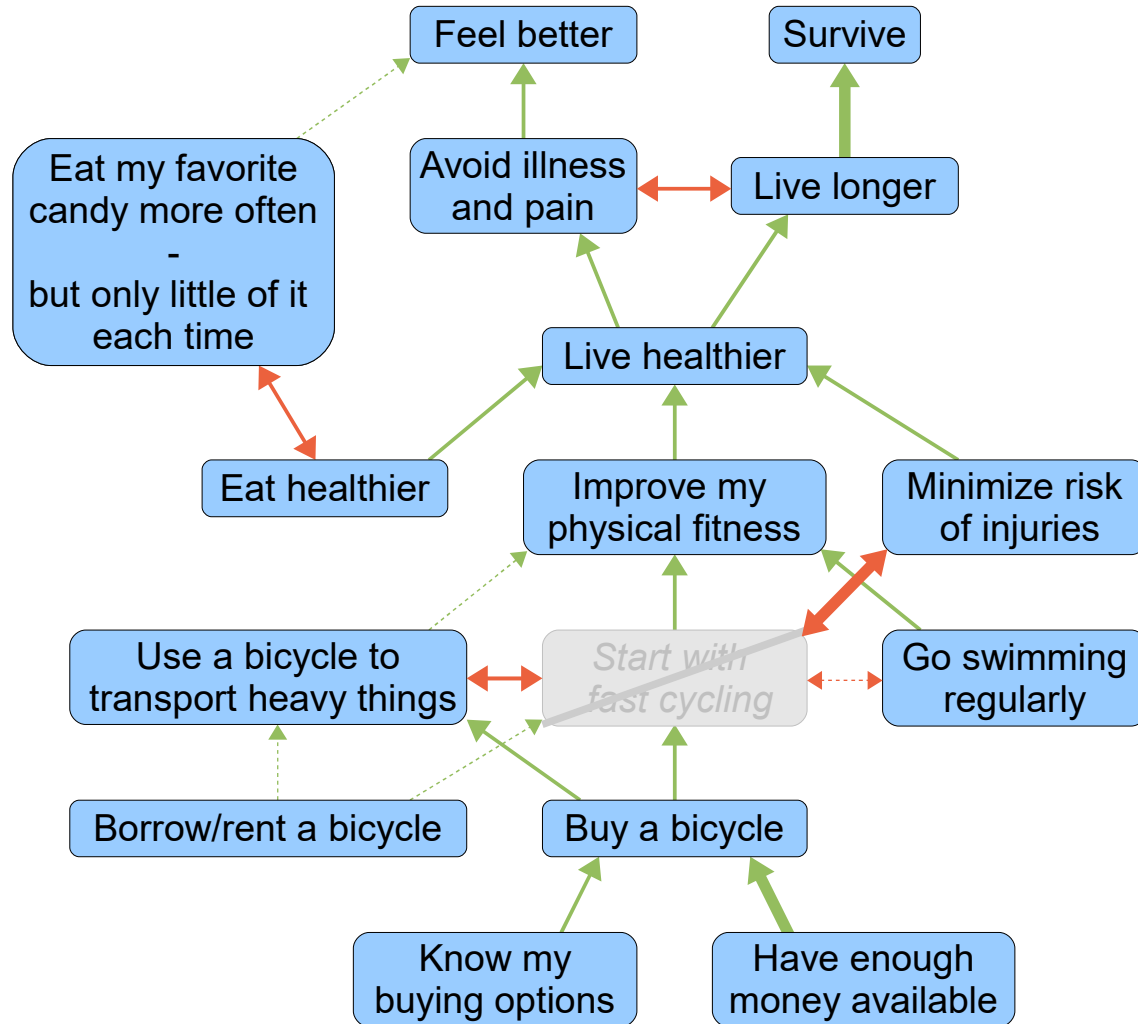


- ↑ : ... is necessary to ...
- ↑ : ... is very helpful to ...
- ↑ : ... is helpful to ...
- ↕ : ... conflicts with ...
- ↕ : ... may conflict with ...
- ↕ : ... competes with ...
- ~~(Goal description)~~ : rejected / discarded goal

I could **modify** my
"... candy more often"
goal as shown, which
would lower the
conflict level.

Fig. 1v : goal map example "Buy a bicycle"

Goal map (example 1)



- ↑ : ... is necessary to ...
- ↑ : ... is very helpful to ...
- ↑ : ... is helpful to ...
- ↕ : ... conflicts with ...
- ↕ : ... may conflict with ...
- ↕ : ... competes with ...

And I could **discard** my
"... fast cycling" goal,
improve my fitness by
swimming instead, and
buy a really sturdy
bicycle rather than a
racing model.

Fig. 1w : goal map example "Buy a bicycle"

Goal map (example 1)



After removing the arrows to/from the discarded goal (for clarity), the diagram looks as shown.

Fig. 1x : goal map example "Buy a bicycle"

Goal map (example 1)



Observant readers might think that the reintroduced "... transport heavy things" goal needs more investigation (using the three-question-method).

That's correct. Any such change must trigger our questions anew.

However, you've seen it before, so we let example 1 end here.

Fig. 1y : goal map example "Buy a bicycle"

The created **goal map** is neither complete nor otherwise perfect.

It doesn't have to be perfect to be useful (but it must cover the intended scenario).

Its usefulness comes from two contributions:

- **the process of making it.**
You can't draw a goal map without consciously thinking about what you want

- **the final result.**
It gives you overview, which is necessary to achieve what you want efficiently (or at all)

Progress

Intro done

"Buy a bicycle" example done
"Save the world" example up next

Achievement indicators

Recap

Checklist

The next example, "I want to save the world", shall only illustrate that:

- it is important how a goal is phrased
- goal maps can be used in very large scenarios

We will proceed much faster this time.

Goal map (example 2)

Save the world

Is this a well-defined
goal?

Goal map (example 2)

Save the world

No, because it could mean a million things.

Watch out for ill-defined goals, they are unmanageable.

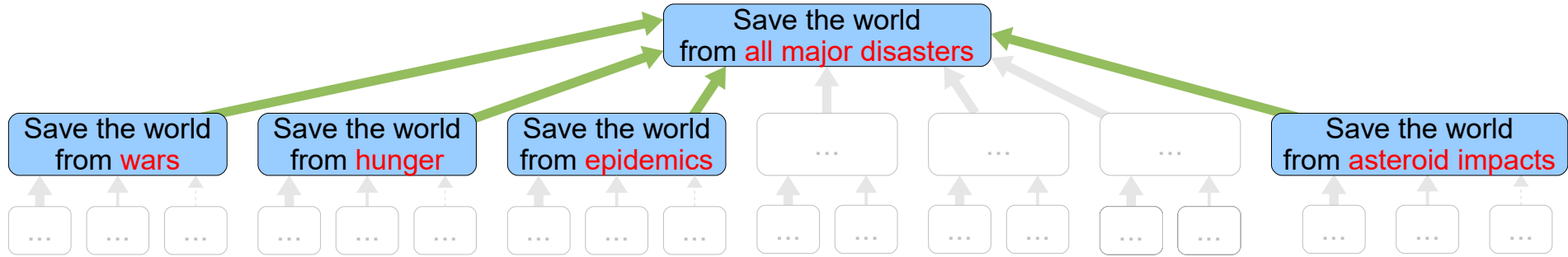
Goal map (example 2)

Save the world
from **all major disasters**

That's better.

Still a wide scope goal,
but manageable, as the
next page shows.

Goal map (example 2)



- ↑ : ... is necessary to ...
- ↑ : ... is very helpful to ...
- ↑ : ... is helpful to ...

Fig. 2d : goal map example "Save the world"

Goal map (example 2)

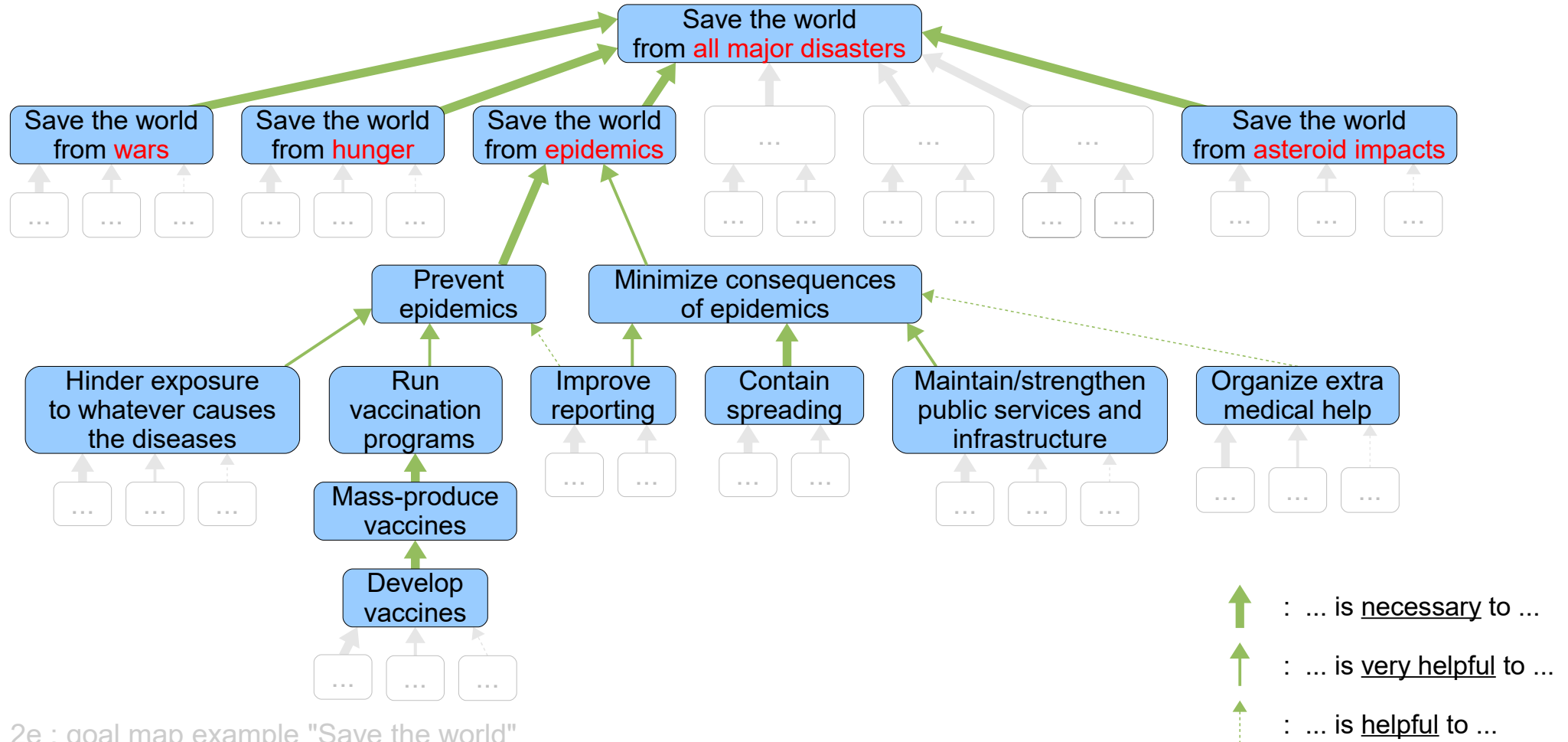
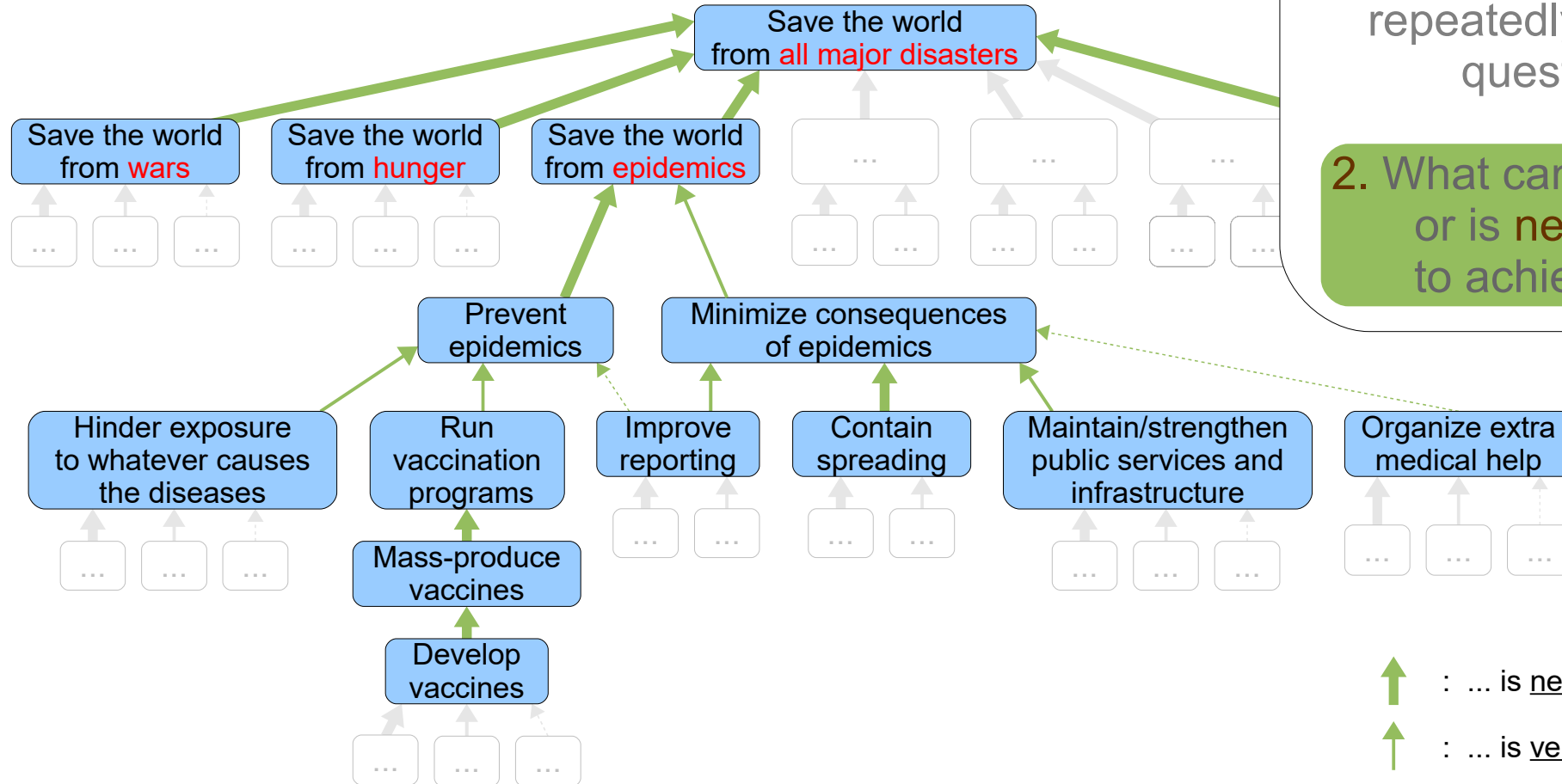


Fig. 2e : goal map example "Save the world"

Goal map (example 2)



This map was first developed downwards (with focus on vaccines), repeatedly asking question

2. What can help me, or is necessary, to achieve this?

- ↑ : ... is necessary to ...
- ↑ : ... is very helpful to ...
- ↑ : ... is helpful to ...

Fig. 2f : goal map example "Save the world"

Goal map (example 2)

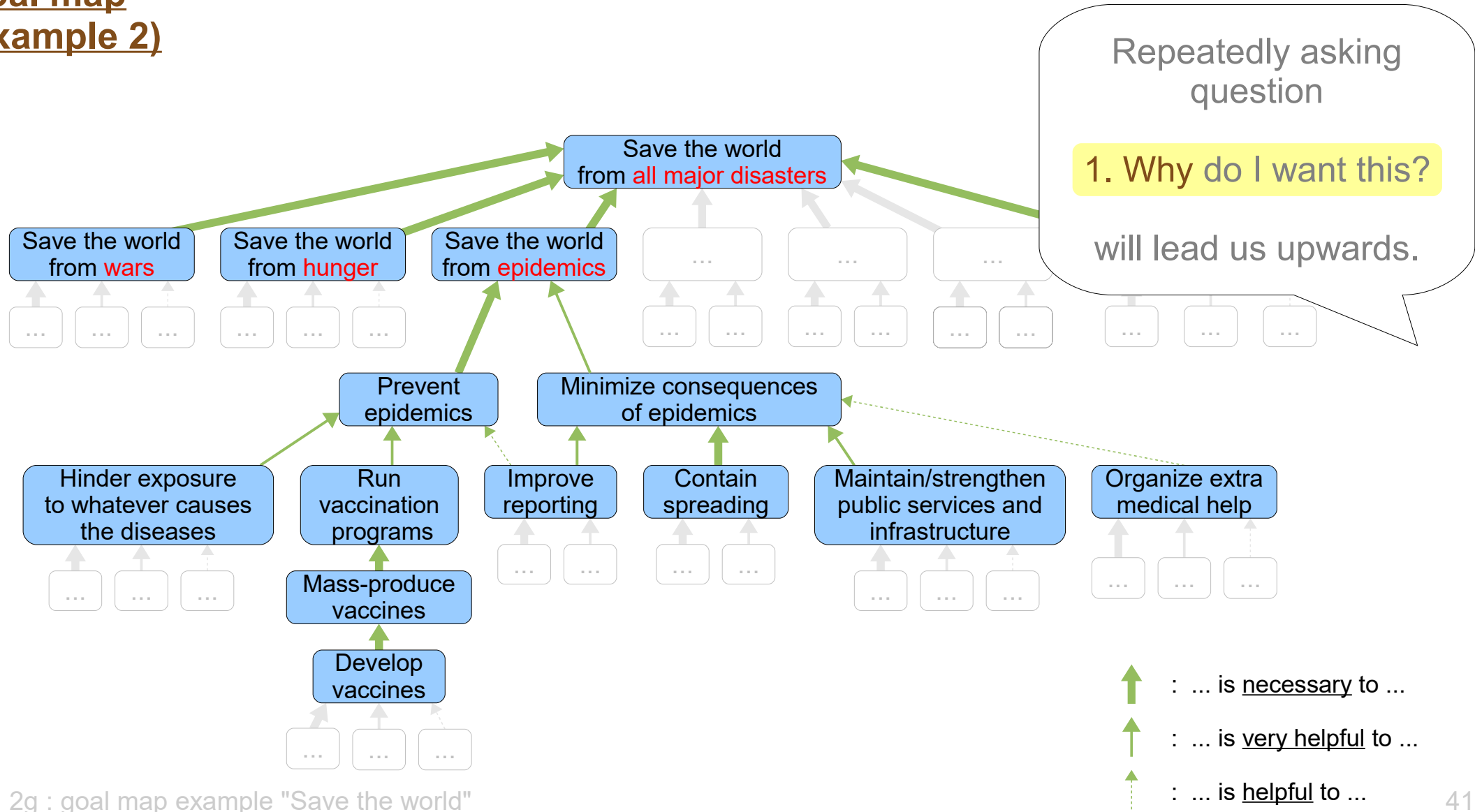


Fig. 2g : goal map example "Save the world"

Goal map (example 2)

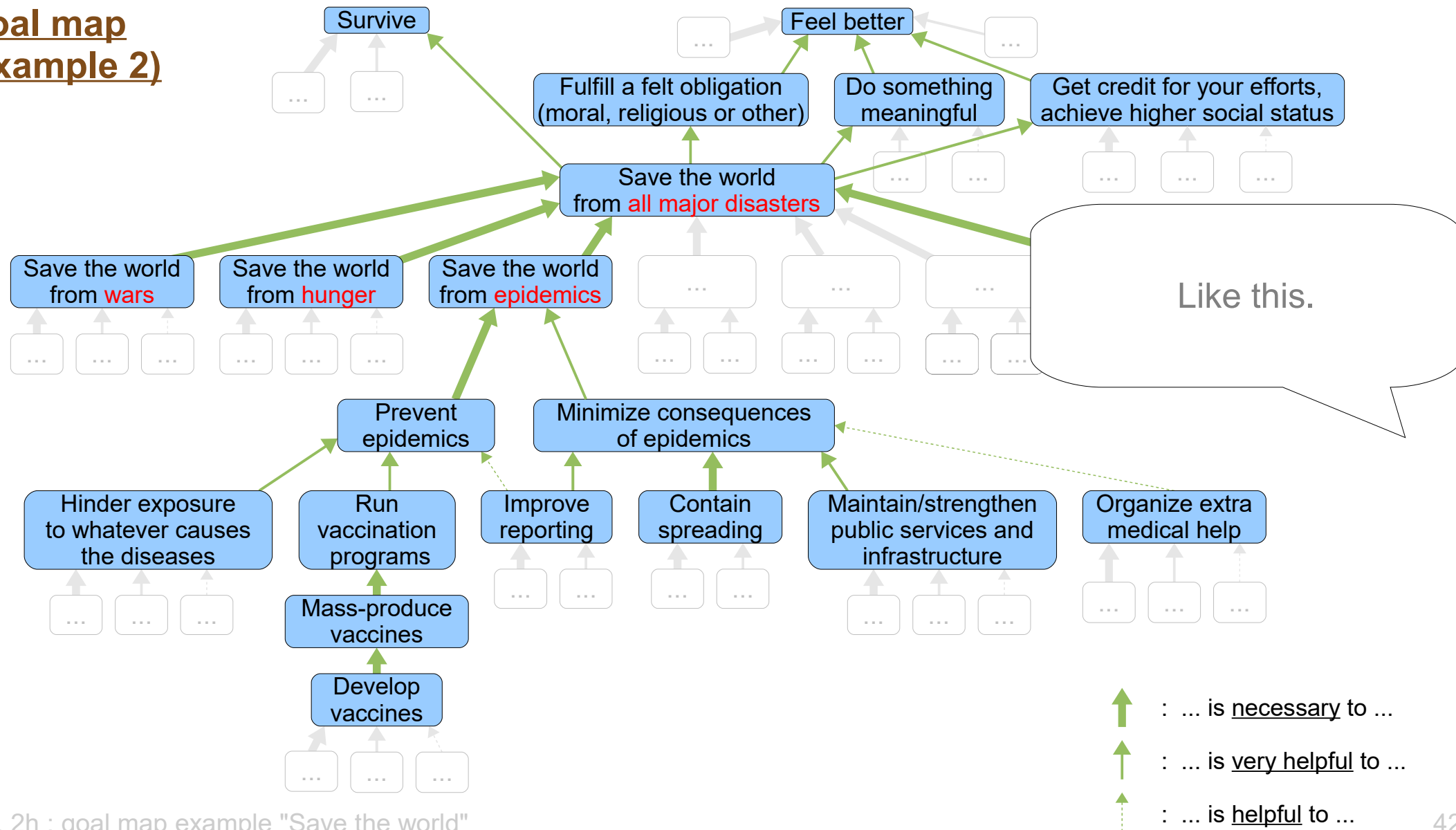


Fig. 2h : goal map example "Save the world"

Goal map (example 2)

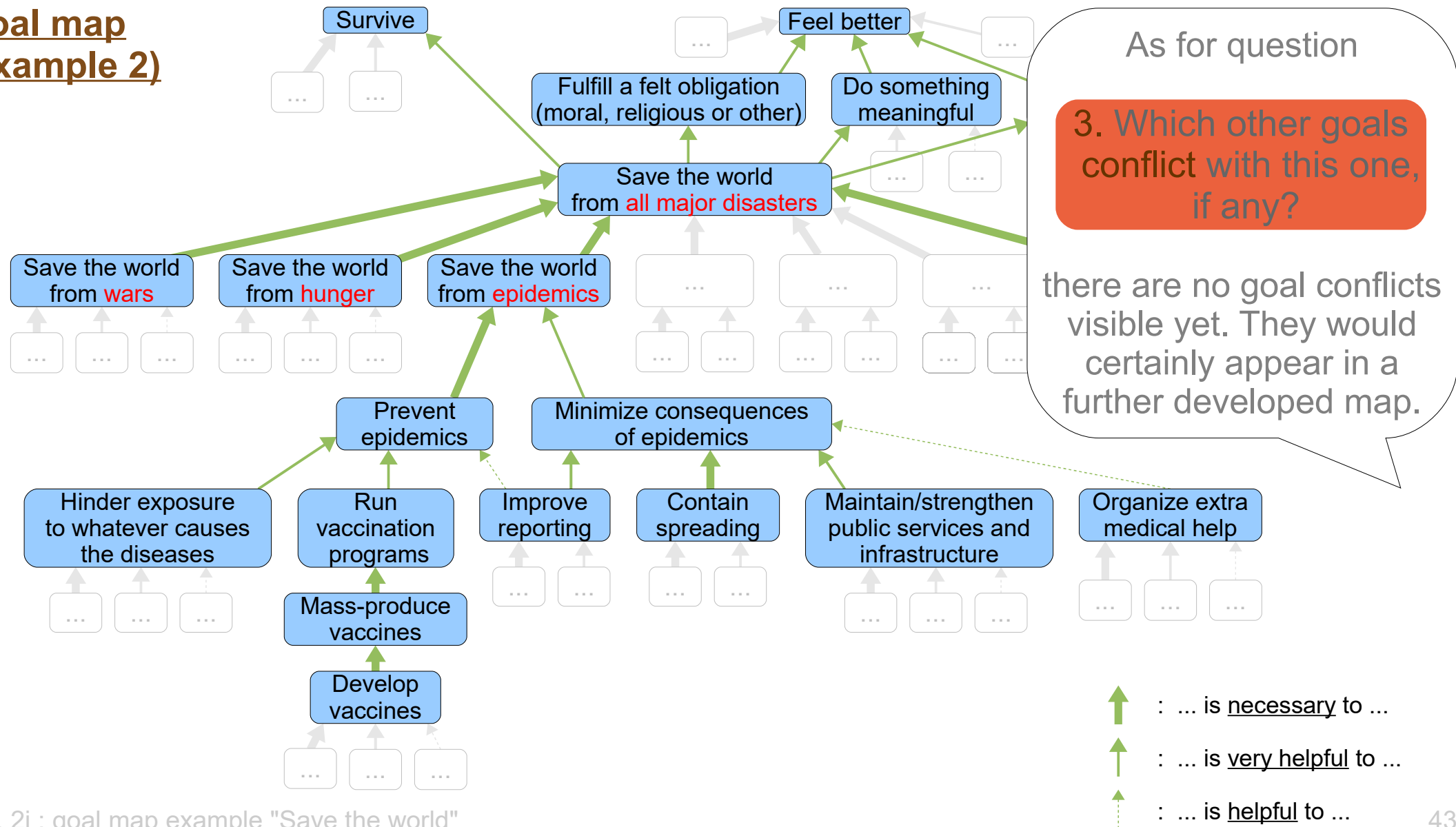


Fig. 2i : goal map example "Save the world"

Goal map (example 2)

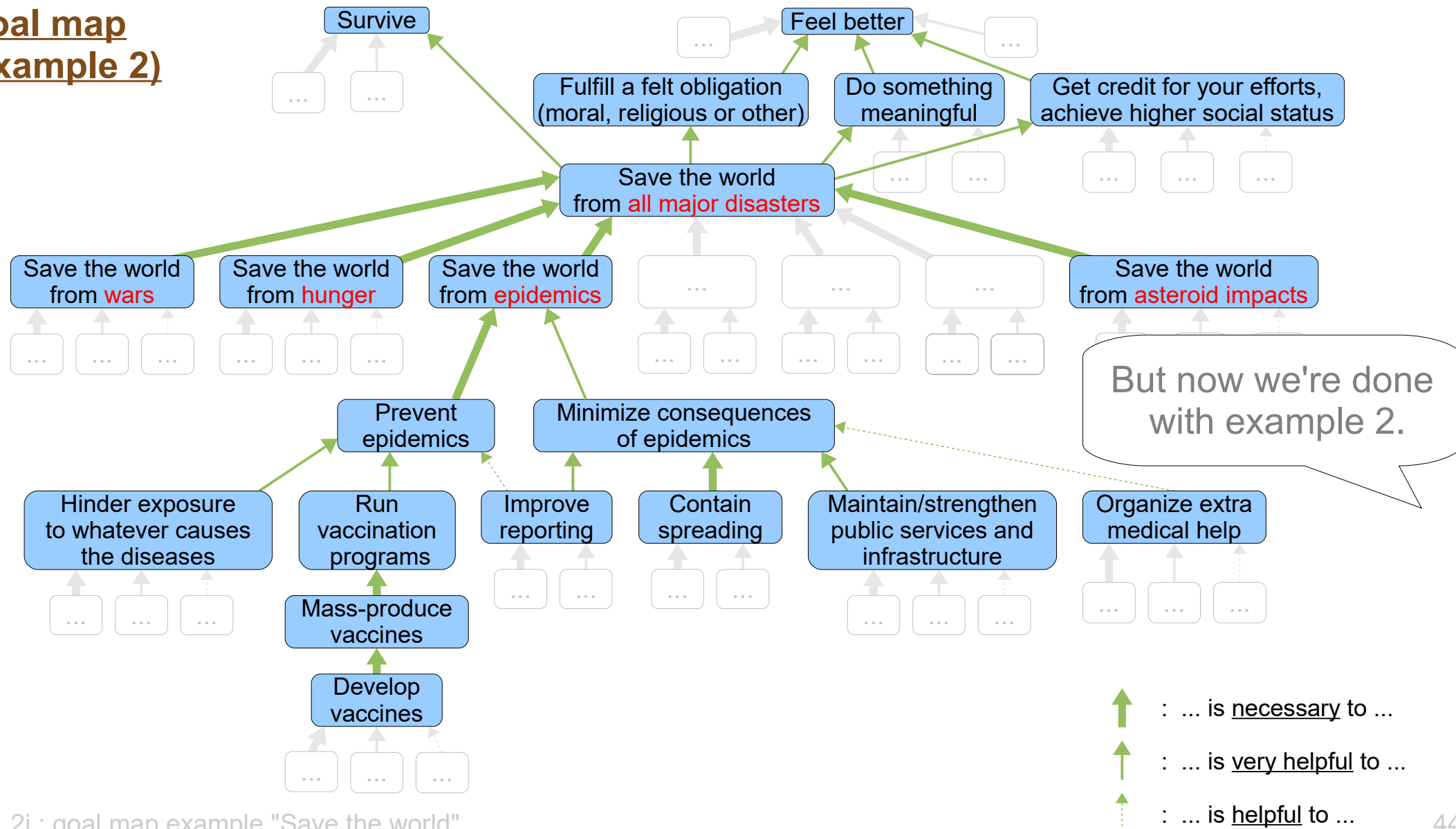
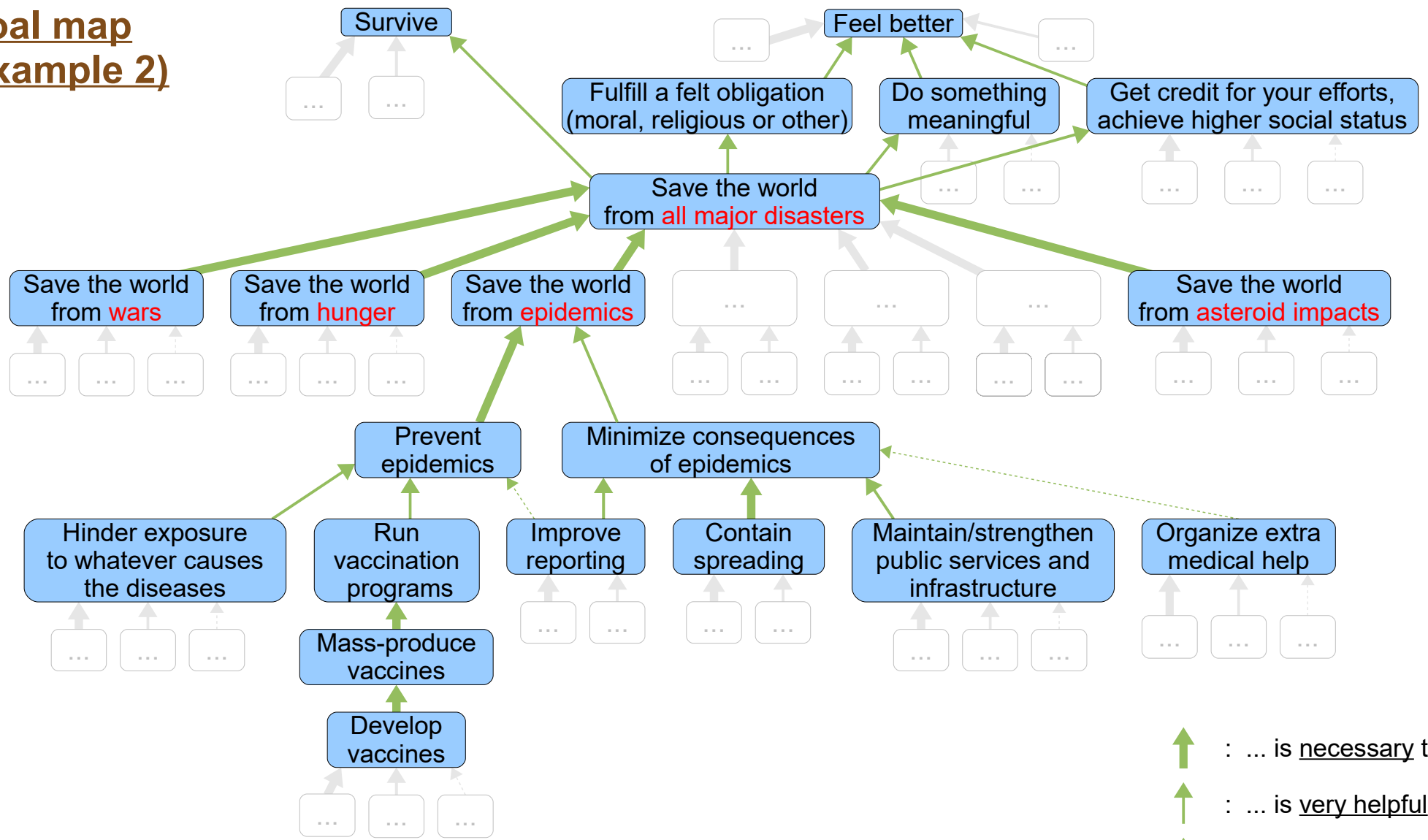


Fig. 2j : goal map example "Save the world"

Goal map (example 2)



- ↑ : ... is necessary to ...
- ↑ : ... is very helpful to ...
- ↑ : ... is helpful to ...

Fig. 2k : goal map example "Save the world"

Progress

Intro done

"Buy a bicycle" example done

"Save the world" example done

Achievement indicators up next

Recap

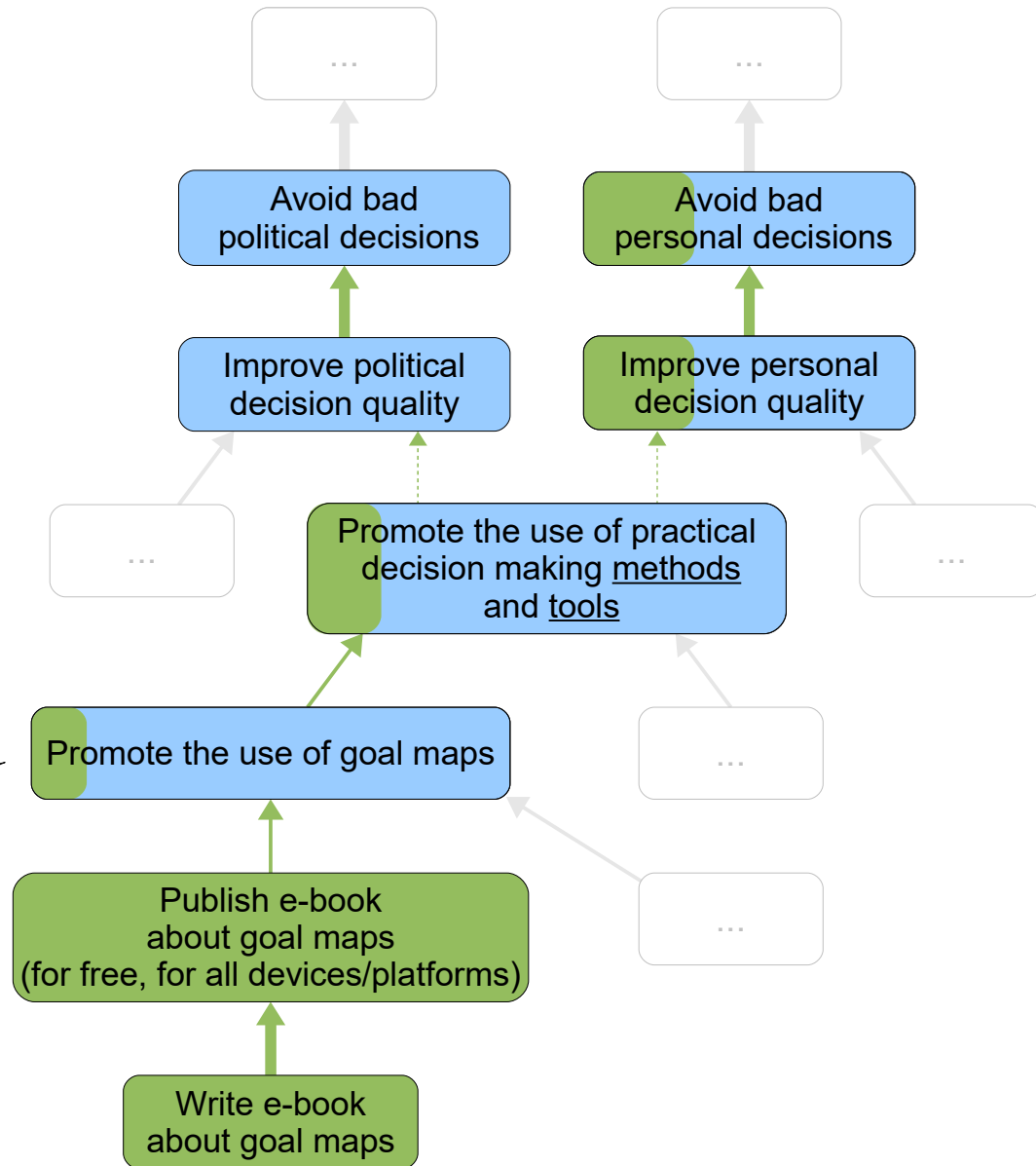
Checklist

Often it's useful to see **achievements** and **progress** (or the lack of it).

Here's a way of showing this within a goal map, using green "progress bars".

A **partially** achieved goal.
Still a long way to go.

A **fully** achieved goal.



Progress

Intro	done
"Buy a bicycle" example	done
"Save the world" example	done
Achievement indicators	done
Recap	up next
Checklist	

Goal map recap

Start with the goal you are most aware of. It goes into the first box:

(goal description)

Develop the map
(and your understanding) by
repeatedly asking the 3 questions
to the right, and ...

... connect the new goal boxes
with arrows that indicate
dependencies or conflicts.

1. Why do I want this?

2. What can help me,
or is necessary,
to achieve this?

3. Which other goals
conflict with this one,
if any?

- ↑ : ... is necessary to ...
- ↑ : ... is very helpful to ...
- ↑ : ... is helpful to ...
- ↕ : ... conflicts with ...
- ↕ : ... may conflict with ...
- ↕ : ... competes with ...

Fig. 3 : goal map recap

Goal maps, argument maps,
decision matrices, checklists, ...
are **tools**.

They enable your mind to perform
tasks it otherwise couldn't.

Just like a screwdriver or hammer
enables your hand to perform
tasks it otherwise couldn't.

If, and only if, you have learned
how to use these tools.

Speaking of checklists, there are
some essential checklist items
listed on the next pages.

Progress

Intro	done
"Buy a bicycle" example	done
"Save the world" example	done
Achievement indicators	done
Recap	done
Checklist	up next

Checklist items

Goal definition	Yes	No	Comments
I am using a tool, such as a goal map, to obtain an overview over my goals and their connections.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I have identified all my relevant goals in this scenario.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I know which goals should (or must) be reached first.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I have thoroughly looked for conflicts between goals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I know how to resolve these goal conflicts, if any.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Fig. 4a : "goal definition" checklist items

Checklist items

Goal definition

Yes No

Comments

I am using a tool, such as a goal map, to obtain an overview over my goals and their connections.

☐☐

I have identified all my relevant goals in this scenario.

☐☐

I know which goals should (or must) be reached first.

☐☐

I have thoroughly looked for conflicts between goals.

☐☐

I know how to resolve these goal conflicts, if any.

If you can tick off all the "Yes" boxes, you're well prepared.

Fig. 4b : "goal definition" checklist items

Checklist items

Goal definition

Yes No

Comments

I am using a tool, such as a goal map, to obtain an overview over my goals and their connections.

☐☐

I have identified all my relevant goals in this scenario.

☐☐

I know which goals should (or must) be reached first.

☐☐

I have thoroughly looked for conflicts between goals.

☐☐

I know how to resolve these goal conflicts, if any.

A ticked off "No" box is like a **warning light** in a cockpit. Better fix the issue before proceeding.

Fig. 4c : "goal definition" checklist items

This is the last page
of this short book.

If you've read it: Thank you.

Previous PDF e-book publications by Edgar Hartel:

“Decision making, politics and quality of life”
“Quality of life as a decision criterion”
“Which factors hinder good decision making”

“How to make and use argument maps”
“How to visualize and evaluate decision options”
“Quality standards for decision making”

Reading/download sites: archive.org openlibrary.org
gutenberg.org (and others)

Free for non-commercial use
Commercial use requires separate agreement



Creative Commons 3.0 Unported License
Attribution - NonCommercial - SharedAlike